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ABSTRACT

This activity is one of a series of 17 teacher-developed instructional activities for geography at the secondary grade level described in SO 009 140. The activity investigates the rationale and means for including attitudes, feelings, and emotions in the environmental education curriculum. Explanation is given about the role of attitudes and feelings in our reactions to environment. Students should understand that their reactions to nature and other people are basically emotional, and that coping with those emotions involves understanding each situation and judging each stimulus. In order to help students understand their feelings and attitudes toward environment, several teaching strategies are suggested. These include discussion of popular folk-rock songs, selection of certain material goods, analysis of historical literature and current media content, and reflection on the meaning of photographs from several points of view. (Author/DB)

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INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES SERIES IA/S-15
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"THIS WORLD IS SO BEAUTIFUL....": FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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The author provides the rationale and means for including attitudes, feelings, and emotions in the environmental education curriculum. The paper concludes with examples for classroom use.

> We walked this afternoon to...Walden Pond. The south wind blew and filled with...warm light the dry and sunny woods. The last year's leaves blew like birds through the air. As I sat on the bank...and saw the amplitude of the little water, what space, what verge, the little scudding fleets of ripples found to scatter and spread from side to side and take so much time to cross the pond, and saw how the water seemed made for the wind and the wind for the water, dear playfellows for each other, -- I said to my companion, I declare this world is so beautiful that I can hardly believe it exists.

Emerson and Thoreau on the banks of Walden Pond feel, they express their dispositions and feelings about natural phenomena. As one reads the works of environmentally aware persons, both contemporary and historical, their feelings and fundamental dispositions toward nature spring forth from the pages. Yet, for some reason, emotions have generally received a bad press in education, including environmental education. Emotions are rarely mentioned, as though feelings might taint our conception of ourselves as rational beings and "problem-solvers." Our feelings of fear and joy, remorse and ecstasy, awe and guilt, wonder and love are ignored or suppressed so that we can get on with "real learning."

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Attitudes also have a curious press in environmental education. Attitudes are invariably those aspects of human belief that someone always wants to change. Give an example of any environmental problem and in any group of five environmental educators, someone will immediately observe that the dilemma is a problem of attitudes and provide a discourse on changing other people -- especially the young.

Ironically, feelings and attitudes are of central importance in any environmental education. Our emotions and attitudes are our points of first contact with our environment. They govern the way we see and the way we act toward nature, others, and even toward ourselves. To ignore feelings in environmental education is to leave us unaware of their operation in our lives and unconscious of how our experiences shape our behavior and our mental well-being. To ignore attitudes or to impose our "good" attitudes on others is to be naive about human development and naive about the power of adult educators. As Marshall McLuhan told us -- "The medium is the message" -- and if our medium is imposing or indoctrinating, our message is devasting!

One route to environmental feelings and attitudes is to confront directly and honestly their importance in our own lives, placing our own feelings and attitudes out in the open and clarifying them. The second phase involves helping our students to honestly confront and clarify their environmental feelings and dispositions.

FEELINGS

Feelings involve 1) an internal emotional sensation from a stimulus and 2) an emotional response to the stimulus. The person responding may or may not be conscious of these feelings and the reasons for the responses which they evoke. Normally, emotions are considered uncontrolled outbursts of non-rational sentiment, as when a person responds with rage or fear in a tense situation. While this is often the case, such emotional sensations and responses are learned. They involve an evaluation and thus can be dealt with, in part, by education. For example, the child terrorized by the sight of a snake can become aware of the basis for that overwhelming fear by obtaining more information about the behavior of snakes and reassessing his evaluation of snakes and the appropriateness of his response. In this way, the emotions are educatable.

Coping with emotions in environmental education must deal with the evaluation of the stimuli and the person's conception of an appropriate response to that stimuli and the emotional sensation which it evokes. In this process there are three types of personal failure. First, a person may make an incompetent judgment of the stimulus. For example, a father may become angry at his daughter's boy-friend due to his long hair; long hair always being a sign of a degenerate character. A humanitarian may become saddened by the State's imposition of a hunting season on timber wolves, not realizing that this removes the animal from "predator" status thus limiting the slaughter of this species. Second, a person may fail to make a thoughtful judgment at all. Unaware of the evaluation of the stimulus, a person feels a sensation and reacts. For example, the father explodes, triggered by the memory of long-haired boys who yesterday stole something from his store. The rancher sees a timber wolf and runs for his rifle. Third, a person may understand the situation and reflect upon his/her evaluation, but not feel and act in accordance with his/her judgment. For example, the father may say "I know he is a great guy, but somehow I just get very angry when I see him here." The rancher understands the important function of the timber wolf on the range habitat and knows that they rarely kill stock, but upon seeing a wolf on his leased-public lands, he runs for his rifle.

Dealing with the emotions, environmental educators need to bring the emotions to consciousness and to question sensitively why such feelings are evoked. To go beyond awareness, the following sequence of questions is useful.

-- How does the person see what is going on in a situation?
Is the perception factually accurate?

-- What evaluation does the person make of the situation?
Why does he make this meaning? This evaluation?
What is his/her experience that evokes this evaluation?
Is he/she aware of the evaluation and the reasons for it?

-- What response does the person make to the situation?
Is he/she aware (conscious) of the response?
Does he/she think the response is appropriate? Why?
Has he/she considered the implications of this response?
Has he/she considered alternative responses and their implications?

-- What actions follow from this conscious evaluation?
Does he/she feel and act in accordance with the conscious evaluation?
Why? Why not?

ATTITUDES

Attitudes are learned complexes of feelings, desires, feats, convictions, prejudices and other tendencies that provide persons with a predisposition to act and react. Attitudes are triggered by specific stimulus objects, symbols, persons, events, and situations, such as the Christian seeing the cross or fish, a child seeing a snake, and an environmentalist standing before bulldozers moving through the bald eagle habitat. One way attitudes are learned is through the accretion of experience, that is, through the integration of numerous specific responses of a similar type. It is not usually the discrete and isolated experience which engenders an attitude; for in itself, the single experience lacks the power and organization in a person's memory, emotion, and meaning system.

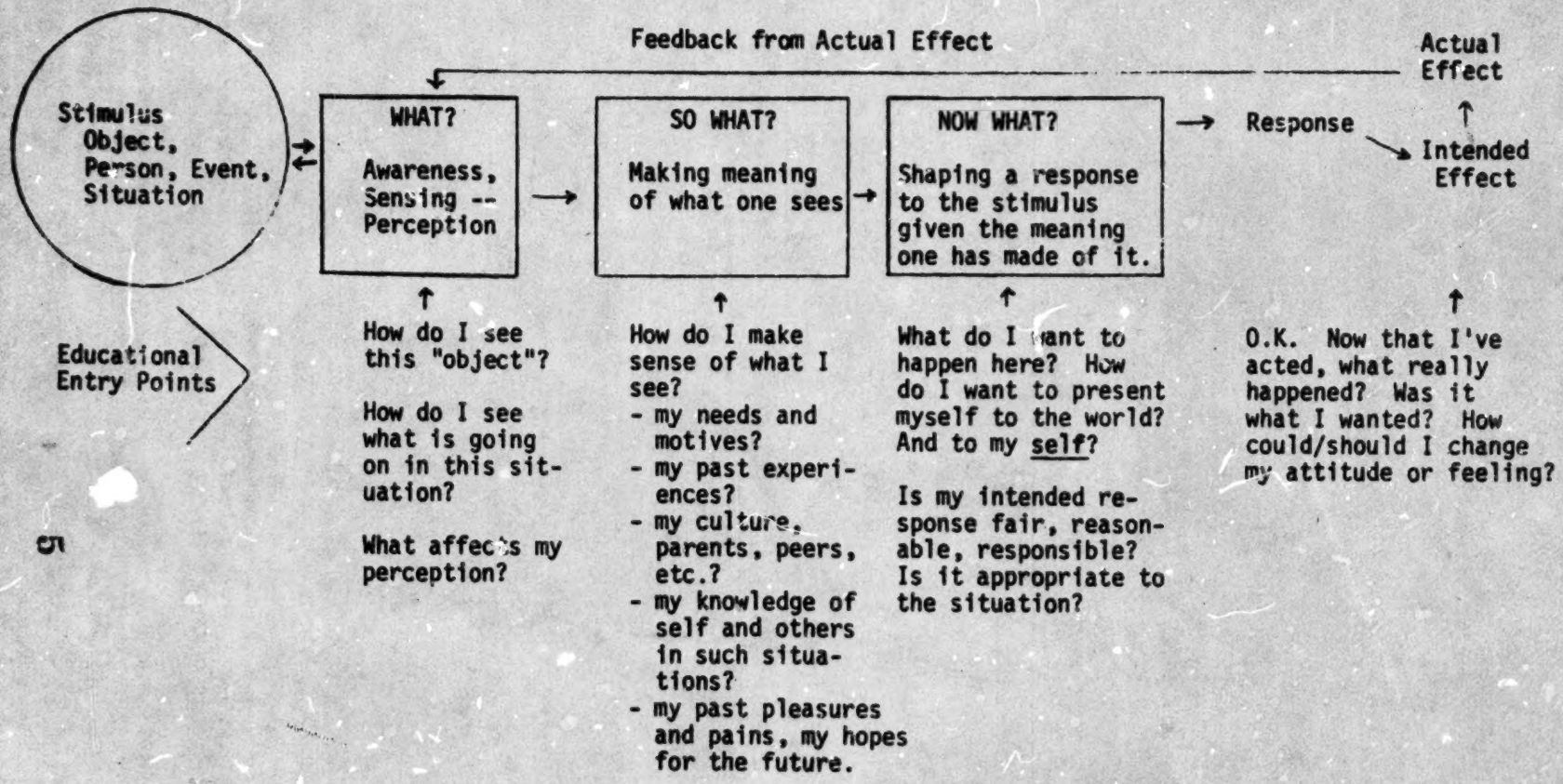
The reasons for coping with feelings and attitudes in environmental education may be examined in two ways.

Self-awareness. Insight into your attitudes and feelings has three dimensions: 1) awareness of your attitudes and feelings given various situations, stimuli, and events, 2) explanation of the source of your attitudes and feelings in personal experience, and 3) assessment of their impact (consequences) on self and others of those attitudes and feelings.

Empathy. Insight into other's attitudes and feelings in situations where beliefs, needs, and personalities are critical. This includes moral sensitivity to other's beliefs, needs, and risks.

To achieve these objectives teachers can take advantage of entry points in the process of expressing feelings and attitudes. The following diagram shows these entry points.

EDUCATIONAL ENTRY POINTS FOR COPING WITH ATTITUDES AND FEELINGS


Feedback from Actual Effect
Actual Effect
Stimulus Object, Person, Event, Situation
WHAT?
Awareness, Sensing -- Perception
SO WHAT?
Making meaning of what one sees
NOW WHAT?
Shaping a response to the stimulus given the meaning one has made of it.
Response
Intended Effect
Educational Entry Points
How do I see this "object"?
How do I see what is going on in this situation?
What affects my perception?
How do I make sense of what I see?
- my needs and motives?
- my past experiences?
- my culture, parents, peers, etc.?
- my knowledge of self and others in such situations?
- my past pleasures and pains, my hopes for the future.
What do I want to happen here? How do I want to present myself to the world? And to my self?
Is my intended response fair, reasonable, responsible? Is it appropriate to the situation?
O.K. Now that I've acted, what really happened? Was it what I wanted? How could/should I change my attitude or feeling?

SOME EXAMPLES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

By taking advantage of these entry points, environmental educators can help students to understand their feelings and attitudes and cope with their personal emotions and dispositions. The sequence of guiding questions (what, so what, now what) may be applied to a vast array of literature, poetry, drama, films, and music to examine emotions. For example, popular music is a vehicle to reach middle school students:

> Cat Stevens is a currently popular English folk-rock singer. Many of his songs are concerned with serious problems and questions, particularly those which he writes himself. If possible, listen to a recording of the song, "Where Do the Children Play?" As you listen to the lyrics, answer the questions provided below.
>
> Questions:
>
> 1) What is the theme of this poem?
> 2) What is its point? Why should we worry about where the children play?
> 3) What attitude is expressed by the writer toward progress? Can you guess something about his priorities?
> 4) How does the recording make you feel?

Classification activities, such as the following "Preference Indicator," elicit student reflection.

> Which of the following would you prefer?
>
> | | | | |
> |---|---|---|---|
> | a) | A regular toothbrush | or | An electric toothbrush |
> | b) | A regular comb | or | An electric comb |
> | c) | Ride a bicycle | or | Drive a car |
> | d) | Drive a car | or | Take a bus |
> | e) | Use a safety razor | or | Use an electric razor |
> | f) | Use a fan | or | Use an air conditioner |
> | g) | Fuel oil heat | or | Electric heat |
> | h) | A Ford Pinto | or | A Lincoln Mark IV |
> | i) | Take a train | or | Fly in a jet |
>
> Why do you prefer one alternative over the other?
> How do your choices reflect the typical American life-style?
> Do you think your choices are the "right" choices? Why? Why not?

Feature films, readily available from rental libraries also deal with environmental attitudes. Students can explore the feelings and attitudes expressed by the characters in The Yearling, starring Jane Wyman and Gregory Peck, who must deal with the rural Florida "frontier" in the late nineteenth century. The Grapes of Wrath deals with the migration of Okies and Arkies

from the Dust Bowl to California during the Great Depression and provides meaningful lessons about feelings and attitudes. Short films like Alan Watts' Buddhism: Man and Nature and King Films' Tree House, provide a sensitive way to study feelings.

Material from historical literature, contemporary statements, and the daily fare of the mass media are useful. Television programs ranging from The Waltons to Gunsmoke convey feelings and attitudes well worth analysis. High school students might use literature as expressions of environmental attitudes from the era of colonial settlement to the future as projected by science fiction writers. Early childhood educators write stories to be told to, and discussed with, children. School and public libraries house numerous stories which serve parents and educators in helping children shape their disposition to self and toward natural communities.

Statements drawn from biographies, autobiographies, and sacred literature allow high school students to identify and infer the implications of diverse environmental attitudes. These contrasting statements often provide the impetus for strongly opinionated discussion.

> O Lord, how manifold are thy works!
> In wisdom hast thou made them all;
> the earth is full of thy creatures.
> Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
> which teems with things innumerable,
> living things both small and great.
> There go the ships, and Leviathan which thou didst
> form to sport in it.[2]

> Hui Tzu said to Chuang Tzu, "I have a big tree... Its trunk is too gnarled and bumpy to apply a measuring line to, its branches too bent and twisty to match up to a compass or square. You could stand it by the road and no carpenter would look at it twice. Your words, too, are big and useless, and so everyone alike spurns them!"
>
> Chuang Tzu said, "Maybe you've never seen a wildcat or a weasel. It crouches down and hides, watching for something to come along. It leaps and races east and west, not hesitating to go high or low -- until it falls into the trap and dies in the net. Then again there's the yak, big as a cloud covering the sky. It certainly knows how to be big, though it doesn't know how to catch rats. Now you have this big tree and you're distressed because it's useless. Why don't you plant it in Not-Even-Anything Village, or the field of Broad-and Boundless, relax and do nothing by its side, or lie down for a free and easy sleep under it? Axes will never shorten its life, nothing can ever harm it. If there's no use for it, how can it come to grief or pain?"[3]

Studying others' emotions is important, but it is crucial to help students confront their own feelings and attitudes and to help them consciously assess their implications. Give students various emotion-filled names like rage, joy, fear and ask them to act out a behavior which goes with the feeling. Describe possible situations involving environmental quality where they would be likely to feel such an emotion. As a follow-up, students write short stories or micro-dramas on this situation.

Students are given a painting or photograph and are asked, How would you be likely to feel, if you were in this situation? Teachers provide a photograph, a painting, a film clip, a portion of a play or a description of a situation. How would your feelings be different from X (inserting a person "known" to the students, i.e., the President, your father, your great-great-grand-child a century from now, a county commissioner, your next-door neighbor)? Why? How would your feelings be similar to those of X in this situation? Why? Or you know how you feel in this situation, but what about others? Make two lists: one with the names of some persons who would feel as you do, and a list with persons who would probably experience different emotions. How do you account for the similarities and differences?

Photographs of fish kills, roadside litter, "scenic" places, farm soil erosion, strip mining, clear cut "forests", suburban sprawl, urban ghettoes, oil spills, and air pollution elicit responses from students K-12. These strategies can be complemented with questionnaires, cartoons, poetry, quotations, and role-playing situations. Pose the questions suggested in the "Entry Points" diagram or try this sequence of questions.

Sequence One

What happened here? How do you think ____ felt? Why do you think he/she felt that way?	Students state the facts in the situation, make inferences regarding the feelings, and make explanations for persons' emotions.
How did, or would, other persons feel in this situation?	Students are asked to generalize about the causes for certain emotions, given specific situations and stimulus objects or events.
Has something like this ever happened to you? How did you feel? Why do you think you felt this way?	Students are asked to relate the situation of their personal experience, to reflect upon possible reasons for their own emotions, and to test generalizations used to explain why certain emotions are evoked in specific situations.

Would everyone be likely to feel the same way? Why? Why not? If not, what are possible feelings which might be evoked in such a situation and how do you account for this difference?	The teacher strives to help students clarify their explanations of personal experiences and their generalizations with probing questions, sensitively posed.
Sequence Two	
What did _____ do here? What reasons did he/she have? What possible reasons can you infer?	Several students state the facts in the situation as they see them, and make inferences regarding the reasons, needs, motives, intentions, and causes for the action.
What does this tell you about the actors' personal beliefs and experiences?	Students are asked to develop inferences about the actors' attitudes, offering reasons for their inferences, and generalize about the development of certain dispositions toward the environment.
What would you have done here? Why? Have you ever been in a similar situation? How did you act? Why? What does your action tell you about yourself? Are you satisfied with that message? Why? Why not?	Students are asked to relate the situation to their personal experience and reveal their own attitudes for reflection.

Experience indicates these activities and questions successfully help students to clarify their feelings and attitudes toward environmental phenomena. Hopefully, such environmental education efforts will have an impact on environmental perception so that people can find a pond to enjoy and declare with Emerson and Thoreau, "This world is so beautiful...."

References

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journal entry for April 9, 1842.

2. Psalm 104, Revised Standard Version.

3. Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings, Burton Watson, translator, (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1964), pp. 29-30.